

My Beloved Ones,

On September 23rd, we are blessed to celebrate another conception of a beloved saint of God, John the Baptist. The conception of the Forerunner is another example of God's ability to work miracles which are beyond nature; just as it is also another example of how Faith in God relies in lifting our hearts to Him, rather than trusting in our own minds.

St. John's parents were—as with Joachim and Anna, or Abraham and Sarah—of an advanced age: Zacharias was a priest of the Temple, and Elizabeth, descended from Aaron, was a cousin of the Theotokos. As we saw several weeks ago with Joachim and Anna, from the time of the creation of the world, those who were unable to bear children were often put to shame by their neighbors, and this was also the case with Elizabeth. Zacharias was serving in the Temple, undertaking his responsibility to burn incense—when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him, announcing that God had heard their prayers, and would give Elizabeth a child, a son, who they would name John.



More importantly, Gabriel told Zacharias, *“And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”* (Luke 1:14-17) Though Zacharias was astonished at the Archangel's words, his mind would not allow him to understand the Will of God, asking instead for a sign to prove these words. As a result of his disbelief, Gabriel stuck Zacharias dumb, telling Zacharias that he would not regain his speech until all these things occurred.

We can see clearly in the Baptist's conception a reminder to hold fast to our faith in God, rather than our own understanding. Despite his duties as a priest in the Temple, Zacharias allowed himself to doubt the power and the promise of God, because his mind resisted the faith of his heart. May we instead learn from the mistake of this righteous servant of God, and “turn to the Lord our God”, rather than worldly knowledge.

+ALEXIOS

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